

VOTE - Voter Outreach Through Education Washington Secretary of State

UNITED STATES AND WORLD CURRICULUM GRADES 8-12 TEACHER: LESSON 4

THEME: GEE, THAT'S DIFFERENT! COMPARING OUR RIGHTS

Those who are born and raised in this nation often take for granted that suffrage is a right as well as an opportunity. It is also commonly taken as an assumed "right" that one cannot and should not be compelled to exercise the right to vote. We often do not realize that this privileged right is not perceived or protected the same in all nations.

Awareness is the first step in valuing. Learning what differences exist can cause students to appreciate the voting rights they have inherited. Appreciation is a big step toward choosing to utilize the power at their disposal. To achieve this awareness and appreciation, students can be asked to engage in their own exploration of different nations' voting traditions and attitudes. They should be invited to explore their own views of our own voting laws by contrasting them with those of other countries. This activity is designed to assist students in the exploration of alternative systems and of their own values about voting.

ACTIVITY:

Copy Student Lesson Four for each student. Position students into small groups. Ask each group to choose a recorder who will write down the group's answers and explanations to the following questions:

- A. Which fact most surprised your group? Why?
- B. Politically speaking, which situation runs most contrary to your beliefs? Explain.
- C. Which situation in nations other than the United States seems most undemocratic to your group? Why?

Monarchies and dictatorships characteristically restrict the right to vote, for example:

- In Saudi Arabia, no one has the right to vote.
- In the United Arab Emirates, no one has the right to vote OR run for election.
- Azerbaijan, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Libya, Pakistan and Singapore all leave voting rights out of their Constitutions. It is optional for the government to grant it, not a right.
- Women activists in Kuwait held a demonstration in 2002 to demand the right of women to vote and run for public office. The protesters waved banners at two voter registration centers but were turned away.
- The King of Bahrain announced that women would finally be allowed to run for election there, as part of reforms to make the country more democratic. (BBC World Service News, February 2002)
- The male voters in Liechtenstein refused to give voting rights to women. (1971)
- Almost 2 million Pakistanis over 21 years of age, living in 76 countries, were told that they still would not be allowed to vote in Pakistani elections by mail-in ballot. Only those Pakistanis serving in diplomatic missions can exercise their right to vote through postal ballot. India and Bangladesh have also denied this right to their citizens living abroad.
- The Philippine Congress has yet to pass a bill that would allow more than seven million overseas Filipino workers to vote in national and local elections, even though such rights are guaranteed under their Constitution. These citizens abroad send about \$7 billion (United States) back to their country annually since they comprise 20 percent of the labor force.
- Although Australia is not a monarchy or dictatorship, mandatory voting in national elections is the law. There is a financial penalty for not voting.

And in the United States:

- Our Constitution and its Amendments guarantee that all persons born or naturalized in the USA today are citizens with the right to vote at age 18, regardless of race, color or gender.
- The Uniformed and Overseas Citizen Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) enacted by Congress in 1986 requires that the states and territories allow citizens to register and vote absentee in elections for Federal offices. Those covered are members of the United States Uniformed Services and Merchant Marine, their family members, and United States citizens residing outside the United States.
- In addition, most states and territories have their own laws allowing citizens covered by the UOCAVA to register and vote as absentee voters in state and local elections as well.
- Washington State facilitates voting by absentee ballot: not only can you vote by mail, but you can also register to vote by mail. When registering to vote, you can even choose to become a permanent absentee voter, thus receiving all future ballots in the mail.